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THE PLAIN DEALER.

Glaucumque, Medontaque, Therſilochumque. VIRG.

MONDAY, APRIL 5. 1725.

To the PLAIN-DEALER.

SIR,

IT is with no ſmall Expectation, that I obſerve you, in ſome of your Papers, making Excurſions into the Province of *Criticiſm*: It is a Subject, not only *Entertaining*, but *Inſtructive:* and there is no kind of Knowledge, in which thoſe gay Spirits, who are loudeſt, and moſt ready, in giving Judgment, are ſo contemptibly and lamentably deficient, as in the Art of *Judging rightly.*

Two Improvements might be hop'd for, in the Taſte of moſt Readers, from a more general Propagation of the Knowledge of *diſtinguiſhing clearly:* —— We ſhould neither be aſhamed to praiſe the Merit of the Obſcureſt of our *Cotemporaries*; nor afraid to cenſure the Errors of the moſt Popular among the *ancient* Writers.

Homer's famous Catalogue, of *Grecian* Ships, and their Commanders, would, then, I am apt to believe, ceaſe to paſs for one of his Sublimeſt, and moſt Poetical Beauties. Its Geographical Exactneſs would no longer be pleaded as a Ballance, againſt the Dryneſs, and Tedioufneſs, of its Hiſtorical Enumeration: ſince it is no Part of a *Poet*'s Buſineſs, to teach the Situation, Bounds, and Quality, of Countries. Little, occaſional, Deſcriptions of that kind, 'tis true, may, ſometimes, be neceſſary; and, being artfully introduced, and handled, might not only *diverſify* a Poem; but alſo render it *delightful:* without which laſt Quality, the whole Labour is loſt. And nothing, certainly, can *delight*, that is *tireſom*, and *heavy*.

But the Bigotry of a Succeſſion of unpoetical *Commentators*, Men of Learning, without Genius; has heap'd upon this Catalogue, ſuch profuſe, and ill-judg'd *Encomium*, that the whole Herd of Imitators, from the *Taſſo*s of *Italy*, down to the *Bl—— re*'s of *Britain*, have lengthen'd out their hoſtile *Muſter-Rolls*, to the Terror, and Provocation, even of the moſt patient of their gentle Readers. And ſome of theſe have been fortunate enough to meet with Applauſe, more extravagant, even than *Homer*'s: For they have been compar'd with, and *preferr'd* to *Homer*'s. Witneſs *Ben Jonſon*'s commendatory *Viſion*, printed before the old Edition of DRAYTON's Battle of *Agincourt*.

There, *Thou art* Homer: ——*Pray thee* uſe *the Style*
Thou haſt deſerv'd; *and let me read, the while,*
Thy CATALOGUE of SHIPS, exceeding his!

The Catalogue, here meant, is of thoſe Ships, which tranſported the *Engliſh* Forces, in our *Henry* the *Fifth*'s firſt Attempt upon *France*. —— I will entertain the Reader with this (ſo highly applauded) Catalogue; becauſe it may deſerve to ſtand, as a *Proof*, what poor Products we are to expect, from a ſervile, and implicite Imitation.

And, firſt, Seven Ships, from Rocheſter *are ſent,*
The Bonadventure, George, *and the* Expence;
Antilope, Henry, Elephant, Defence:
Bottoms, as good, as ever ſpread a Clue!
All having Charge, their Voyage having been,
Before Southampton, *to take Soldiers in.*

Twelve Merchant Ships, of mighty Burthen all,
New, off the Stocks, that had been rigg'd for Stoad,
Riding in Thames, *by* Limehouſe, *and* Blackwall,
That ready were, their Merchandize to load.
Eight goodly Ships from Briſtol, *ready made,*
With Spaniſh *Wine, which they for Ballaſt lade;*
And, as theſe Eight the Severn *Sea do ſtem,*
Five more, from Padſtow, *came along with them.*

From Plimouth *next, came in the* Blazing-Star,
And Fiery Dragon, *to take in their Fraught,*
With other Four, eſpecial Men of War,
That in the Bay of Portugal *had fought:*
The Hare *of* Loo, *a right good Ship, well known,*
That twice, the Year before, the Streights had paſt;
Two wealthy Spaniſh *Merchants did her own,*
Who, then, but newly had repair'd her Waſte:
And, from Mount's-Bay, *Six more, that ſtill in Sight,*
Waited with her before the Iſle of Wight.

Nine Ships, for the Nobility, there went
Of able Men, the Enterprize to aid;
Northumberland, *and* Weſtmoreland, *in ſent*
Fourſcore at Arms apiece, and themſelves laid
At Six ſcore Archers each; as Suffolk *ſhows*
Twenty tall Men at Arms, and Forty Bows.

Darcy, *and* Camois, *zealous for the King,*
Lovel, Fitzwater, Willoughby, *and* Roſs,
Berkly, Powis, Burrel, *faſt together cling,*
Seymour, *and* St. John, *for the Buſineſs cloſe,*
Each Twenty Horſe, and Forty Foot do bring,
More, to Nine hundred, mounting in the Groſs,
In thoſe Nine Ships; and fitly them beſtow'd,
With which the other fall into the Road.

From Holland, Zealand, *and from* Flanders, *won*
By weekly Pay, Threeſcore Twelve Bottoms came,
From Fifty upward, to Five hundred Tun.
For every Uſe, a Mariner could name:
Their glitt'ring Flags, againſt the radiant Sun,
Show'd, as if all the Sea had been on Flame;
Then Skiffs, Crays, Scallops, and the like, why theſe,
From every ſmall Creek, cover'd all the Seas.

This,

[Price Two-Pence.]

This, though a bald, and unlovely Imitation of *Homer*, is better, I think, in one Senſe, than the Original, by ſo much, as it is *ſhorter*; for no Man of Reaſon will be perſuaded to believe, that in a Poem of this kind, ſuch a tedious, and dry Liſt of a Fleet, though it preſerves a particular Piece of Antiquity (which is the Commentators weak Defence for *Homer*) can ſtand agreeably in the Place of Invention, Spirit, Fancy, and the Energy of Poetry.

Such a barren, and diſtinct Enumeration gives a wearifom Satiety to the Mind, and drags too hard on the Attention. When I read, for ſo many Leaves together, not what Perſons *do*, but who they *are*, and whence they *came*; without any of that enlivening Variety of Circumſtance, or Deſcription, which ſhould relieve the Imagination, it puts me in Mind of our Anceſtors ſimple Epitaphs: Honeſt People! who thought it Merit enough to have lived, married, and got Children, without loading their Tomb-ſtones with the Weight of their *Actions*!

Of William Wilſon, Joan *his Wife*,
And Alice, *their Daughter dear*,
Theſe Lines be left, to give Report,
Thoſe Three lie buried here;
And Alice *was* Henry Deacon's *Wife*,
Which Henry *lives on Earth*;
And is the Serjeant-Plummer unto *Queen* Elizabeth.
With whom our Alice *left Iſſue here*,
Her virtuous Daughter Joan,
To be his Comfort, every-where,
Now joyful Alice *is gone*.

And again.

Here the good Lady Margaret North
In Tomb doth quiet *lie*;
Of Husbands Four *the* able *Spouſe*,
Whoſe Fame ſhall never die:
One Andrew Frances *was the Firſt*;
The Second Robert *hight*,
Surnamed Chartſey, *Alderman*;
Sir David Brook, *a Knight*:
But then comes he, that paſſed all,
And was, in Number, Fourth,
One, for his Virtue, *made a* Lord,
and call'd Sir Edward North.

Among all theſe copious Particularities, there is nothing, that deſerv'd the telling, if we except the great Rarity, that comes in the Rear; A Man made a *Lord* for his *Virtue!* That, indeed muſt be own'd to have been a Wonder worth recording: It was conſider'd too, it ſeems, as an Accident ſo unuſual, that the good Man appears, by the laſt Verſe, to have been aſhamed of his Singularity; and rather choſe to ſtick faſt to his old knightly Title of Sir *Edward*, than be pointed at, as he paſſed the Streets, for a kind of Miracle. But here follows ſomething, which no Poet's Liſt among them all, can compare with, for Exactneſs.

This Life hath on Earth no certain While,
Example by John, Mary, *and* Oliver Stile;
Who, under this Stone, lieth *buried in the Duſt*,
And putteth *you in Memory, that* all *die* muſt.

John Stile, *born* 1582, *the* 22*d of* May;
Died 1583, June *the* 25*th Day*:
The 5*th of* October 1583, Mary Stile *born* was;
Auguſt *the* 5*th* 1585, *out of this Life ſhe did* paſs.
Oliver Stile *the* 25*th of* February 1584, *this mortal Life begun*,
And ended the ſame Auguſt *the* 9*th* 1585, *his Courſe being then run.*

Now, Sir, bating, as is neceſſary, for the Difference between the *Verſes*, a Man is apt to conclude, That a Poet, too prolix in the Liſts, I have been ſpeaking of, has as little to ſay for the Actions of the greateſt Part of his Captains, as theſe very exact Epitaphs, for the *Oliver's*, *Alice's*, *Joan's*, and *Andrew's*, who occaſioned them.

I am, SIR,

Your Conſtant Reader,

and Humble Servant, &c.

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